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1. Comparing the Uncomparables

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Pāļi text of Yaṃkiñcītigāthāvaṇṇanā ¹	The Official English Translation ²
Ariyaratanampi duvidham sekhāsekhavasena.	And the Noble jewel is also twofold as the Initiate and
	the Adept.
Asekharatanampi duvidham	And the Adept is also twofold as the bare-insight
sukkhavipassakasamathayānikavasena.	worker [sukkhavipassaka] and the one whose vehicle
	is quiet [<i>samathayānika</i>].
Samathayānikaratanampi duvidham	The one whose vehicle is quiet is also twofold as one
sāvakapāramippattamappattañca.	who has reached the Disciples' Perfections and one
	who has not.
Tattha sāvakapāramippattam aggamakkhāyati.	Herein, one who has reached the Disciples' Perfections
Kasmā? Guṇamahantatāya.	is accounted the foremost. Why? Because of the
	greatness of his qualities.
Sāvakapāramippattaratanatopi	Also a Hermit Enlightened One [paccekabuddha] is
paccekabuddharatanam aggamakkhāyati.	accounted foremost in comparison with one who has
Kasmā? Guṇamahantatāya.	reached the Disciples' Perfections. Why? Because of
	the greatness of his qualities;
Sāriputtamoggallānasadisāpi hi anekasatā	For even several hundred disciples like Sāriputta and
sāvakā ekassa paccekabuddhassa guṇānaṃ	Moggallāna are not to be compared to a hundredth
satabhāgampi na upenti.	part of a Hermit Enlightened One's qualities.
Paccekabuddharatanatopi	Also a Fully Enlightened One is accounted foremost in
sammāsambuddharatanam aggamakkhāyati.	comparison with a Hermit Enlightened One. Why?
Kasmā? Guṇamahantatāya.	Because of the greatness of his qualities;
Sakalampi hi jambudīpam pūretvā pallankena	For even if Hermit Enlightened Ones were seated all
pallaṅkaṃ ghaṭentā nisinnā paccekabuddhā	over Jambudīpa [i.e. whole India] crosslegged and
ekassa sammāsambuddhassa guņānam neva	with knees touching each other, not even [all together]
saṅkhaṃ na kalaṃ na kalabhāgaṃ upenti.	would they count beside, exhibit a fraction or a part of
	a fraction of, a single Fully Enlightened One's qualities.

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¹ Khuddakapāṭha-Aṭṭhakathā - 6. Ratanasuttavaṇṇanā - Yaṃkiñcītigāthāvaṇṇanā (MM p.149)

² "The Illustrator of Ultimate Meaning (Paramatthajotikā) Part I", Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, PTS, London, 1978, pp.192-193

2. Mahasi Sayadaw

Biography notes from Yahanta Hnint Pogol Htu Myar by U Htay Hlaing, Mogok Offset, Yangon, 1993, p.18-20. Notes first started by Ma Kyi Phyu, finished by me. My English translation.

- Sayadaw showed his (Dhamma) abilities, shining in the 6th Buddhist Council, when the Dhamma reached 2500 years of being preserved. This was the occasion when the main Pāļi script, Commentaries, and Sub-Commentaries were scrutinized, edited, and printed.
- There Mahasi Sayadaw, together with Mingun Sayadaw, assumed the highest position. Mahasi Sayadaw however took more responsibility for scrutinizing the texts. Both of them were communicating by questions and answers during the Buddhist Council, explaining what was to be known. That was most undertaken by Mingun Sayadaw. While Mingun Sayadaw aroused faith in lay people by his teachings, Mahasi Sayadaw explained the historical and explorative decisions expanding thus knowledge and understanding in the people that were acquainted with the scriptures.
- There the current Ma So Yeing Sayadaw (96 years old) remarked that Mahasi Sayadaw was able to point out mistakes [perhaps commonly adhered to] not realized by the teachers of Commentaries and Sub-Commentaries.
- Mahasi Sayadaw suggested changes in certain scriptures of later data, showing his profound knowledge and understanding of their subject matter, and himself was requested to write a verbatim translation for the Pāļi text of *Visuddhimagga Mahāṭīkā* (with his explanations), as a great honor of his scriptural intellect. (Mahasi Sayadaw completed the translation and it is now freely available in full, making the meaning of the *mahāṭīkā* for the first time available today.)

The Heyday of Satipatthana

- Mahasi Sayadaw composed over 40 books related to *Vipassanā*, such as "The Method of Vipassanā Practice" (ဝိပဿနာရှနည်းကျမ်း) explaining the original *suttas* (related to *vipassanā*) in a very readable, interesting form. They serve as the benchmark (/"touchstone") (for other *vipassanā* works). It is similar to a great lake of meditation practice, buttressing on four stilts, (and) fortifying (it like) a dam.³
- Sayadaw started to teach meditation in his 14th year of monkhood, and in 1311 ME (1949 CE) there were over 30 branches (affiliates) of the meditation center [i.e. meditation centers affiliated to the main meditation center]. Now there are 236 branches (affiliates) of the meditation center throughout Myanmar and almost eight hundred thousand yogis. There are over 30 branches and around twenty thousand yogis. In Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos altogether over 300 branches, in Indonesia 70 branches. There are continuously coming many foreigners to learn meditation from Mahasi Sayadaw. Sayadaw's books about meditation were translated into foreign languages by people such as ven. Ñāṇaponika from Germany.
- (The author thinks that the appreciation of Ledi Sayadaw, the sayadaws of Ma So Yein Monastery, and others who have contributed to the clarity and availability of the true Dhamma in English and thus

³ An attempt to include poetic expression, not easy to translate in English.

⁴ This information was written before 1993, the year of the book's publishing.

throughout the world, is very little. The author further thinks that the duty of monks is to spread the Dhamma all around the world.⁵)

- The spread of Mahasi Sayadaw's teachings happened not only through his knowledge and meditation practice, but also through the simplicity of the instructions, strict observances, daily teaching and explaining the instructions, and attention to the meditation practice of hundreds of yogis. It was also possible because of the lay people's generous offerings and care.
- "In short, the Benefactor Mahasi Sayadaw, uprooting all the sandbank-rocks, bush, and confusion -like hair-splitting vexers in the great river of meditation practice, succeeded in strenthening (of the legacy of Buddhist teachings) by great power and fortification."6

3. Saya May Kin and Saya May Nat Bay - Two Great Nuns of Modern Myanmar

Notes by Ma Kyi Phyu, from Bhikkhuni Tharthana Hnint Thilashin Thamaing by Yawethun, Pāramī Sāpe, Yangon, 1998, pp.161-187. My English translation.

("nun" is always translation of the Burmese word ဆရာလေး (sayalay) or သီလရုင် (thilashin))

- The book "မြန်မာမကိပူရ အရေးတော်ပုံ" contains biography of SMK & SMNB.
- Saya Kin (nun) lived together with Saya May Nat Bay
- The natal details of May Nat Bay are not known.
- In the era of Botaw Mindayagyi (ဘိုးတော်မင်းတရားကြီး), in 1168 ME (1806 CE) Saya May Nat Bay arrived to Myanmar from Manipūra; Saya May Nat Bay's father who was skilled in masonry together with (a number of) artists of Khasi⁸ have arrived to the country of Myanmar (already) when children.
- May Nat Bay's father was doing masonry work on the unfinished Mingun Pagoda (မင်းကွန်းပုထိုးကြီး) and at that time he entrusted his daughter to the nuns, where she ordained as a nun.
- She got the name Devadinnā ("given by god(s)"). There was no particular reason for this name, although later there were related occurrences.

⁵ Interestingly, although this is a very common view in Asian countries, the Buddha has never suggested that monks who are not yet Arahants should engage in large scale missionary activities. On the contrary, monks who are not even Stream-Enterers should dedicate all of their time and effort to understanding the Four Noble Truths, even more than they would try to quench fire on their clothes or head (this is e.g. in Cela Sutta (SN 5.12.4.1), Phenapindūpama Sutta (SN 3.1.10.3.), *Maranassati Sutta* (AN 6.2.10.), and other.)

⁶ Another attempt for poetic expression.

⁷ Maṇipūra (မက်ိပူရ) is the region of Kathay (ကသည်း) tribe, in NW Myanmar. It was renamed to Maṇipūra in 1104 ME from Kathay Country (ကသည်းပြည်); there the town Myi Thay (မျည်းတဲမြို့) was also renamed to Maṇipūra Town (မက်ိပူရမြို့)။ People of Kathay region are in fact descendants of Shans. Maṇipūra land was seized in 1126 by king Mindaya and many of its residents moved to the Burmese capital, Innwa. After several battles the country sought safety in British empowerment. In 1181 it was experiencing darkness and unrest during the British rule. In 1182 king Mindaya seized Manipūra region at the second battle, upon which over two thousand of Kathay people moved to Amarapura and Innwa.

⁸ Myanmar-English Dictionary explains: "Khasi: people of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills area in Assam, speaking a kind of Mon-Khmer language.

 $^{^9}$ The Burmese name May Nat Bay (မယ်နတ်ပေး) is derived from the Pāḷi name Devadinnā: May = mother/nun, Nat = god(s), Bay = give, given.

- Also, giving the name Khema ("free from danger") was how the nun Saya Kin got her name, because "Kin" (ကင်း, free)¹⁰ is based on her Pāḷi name.
- Saya May Nat Bay was ten years older than Saya Kin.
- In the beginning these two nuns didn't live together Saya May Nat Bay stayed in Mingun, and Saya Kin stayed in the Sagaing Hills.
- Saya May Nat Bay stayed for a long time in the Mingun Gugalay Hermitage (မင်းကွန်းဂူကလေးချောင်) and when she became adult she built a little pagoda of ca. 15 feet height on the hill above the hermitage. (Now the place of the little pagoda is known as Dhammasāra Hermitage (ဓမ္မသာရချောင်).
- Because the pagoda was repeatedly repaired as "May Nat Bay Pagoda" (မယ်နတ်ပေးဘုရား), (together with its) four lions of ancient appearance, as well as four zinc pots in form of a lotus, it (the) pagoda can be respectfully visited (even today).
- In that very place is the little cave, now however damaged/destroyed, where May Nat Bay practiced meditation. (Yawehtun, the author of the source-book of this information, invites (/"expects") the readers to arouse the intention to repair the damaged paintings of meditating May Nat Bay, old works of art, and other pieces in that site.)
- The Gutalone Hermitage (ဂူတစ်လုံးချောင်း, "The Hermitage of One Cave"), is the place where Saya Kin stayed. However, Saya Kin didn't stay long in monasteries or guest-houses. She had the habit of staying under trees and bamboos and meditate. Her students had to follow her when studying (Buddhist texts under her guidance) and also stay in ravines, gullies, at trees, and bamboos.
- Saya Kin enjoyed taeching the Buddhist scriptures and giving Dhamma discourses. Saya May Nat Bay however enjoyed the practice of meditation. Giving little bit of lecturing on Buddhist scriptures and (little bit) of Dhamma discourses, Saya May Nat Bay avoided teachings as much as she could, because she rejoiced in solitude a lot.
- Saya May Nat Bay explained meditation to Saya Kin.
- On the Thadingyut full-moon day of 1209 ME (1847 CE) the king of Bagan left Amarapura going to pay respects to the Sagaing's Kaunghmudaw (Maṇicūḷa) Pagoda together with his royal retinue, by boat. The king of Bagan in his prince age enjoyed catching doves by decoy, capturing partridges, etc., and therefore he joined the festivities of Sagaing Hills (on those days). Saya May Kin and Saya May Nat Bay, however, were practicing *vipassanā* meditation in a ravine at that time.
- As the king Mindon with the prince Kanaung were travelling (around Sagaing Hills), they came across the two nuns in the ravine and out of great respect they (the king and the prince) decided to invite these nuns to the "golden town" and show honor to the nuns there, paying respect to them.
- When king Mindon became king in the month Dabaung of the year 1214 ME (February 1853 CE) dethroning his brother from the Bagan throne, he (king Mindon) travelled to Amarapura to receive his (king's) consecration. He also consecrated his younger brother, the prince Kanaung, as the crown prince. Then, because (the king and the prince) were managing the issues of the country, they were not able to carry out the determined invitation of the two nuns to the capital city.
- After the Mandalay city was first founded in 1218 ME (1856 CE), in 1221 ME (1859 CE), the (other) capital cities and palaces came to an end (in their function). In 1217 ME (1855 CE) Ashin Nanda of Shwebo's

¹⁰ The last part of ဘေးရန်ကင်း [bay yan kin] (=free from danger], the Burmese translation of the Pāḷi *"khema"*, is ကင်း [kin].

Kaw Taw Village (ကောတောရွာ) was invited in Amarapura, where a monastery was built, in Shan Kalay Kyun (ရှမ်းကလေးကျွန်း)'s western side and donated (to Saṅgha of monks). **Thus was ven. Nanda later known as the Shan Kalay Kyun Sayadaw.**

- Shan Kalay Kyun Sayadaw and Saya Kin were descendants of the Khasi royal lineage. In the time of king Bagyidaw (ဘကြီးတော်မင်းတရား), in 1182 ME (1820 CE) Saya Kin was 6 years old, and and Shan Kalay Kyun Sayadaw was around 10 years old.
- Ashin Nanda became famous at the time when the king of Bagan became a king. When Ashin Nanda was studying the scriptures, he had the habit of memorizing the main Pāļi texts as well as the Commentaries. Because the Thay Inn Thathanabaing had great appreciation of Ashin Nanda's evening's scriptures teaching, he (the Thathanabaing) arranged sending meals every day (for Ashin Nanda). Ashin Nanda was also very clever in solving Vinaya questions.
- One time, however, the teacher of Bagan king, Bakaya Sayadaw Thathanabaing, made a decision in an official proceeding of a monastic issue, and because Ashin Nanda again (led and) made a (different) decision in (the same) monastic issue, (Bakaya Sayadaw) being displeased,¹¹ expelled Ashin Nanda, saying: "The young man Nanda shall leave from the three regions, (namely) Amarapura, Innwa, and Sagaing." Therefore, Ashin Nanda stayed and taught Dhamma scriptures together with his disciples to the disciples in the guest-house of Let Kho Kaw Village of Shwebo Hill. When Thee Lone Sayadaw learned about this, he (Thee Lone Sayadaw) donated ponds for the monastery. (I.e. made them built.)
- When Thee Lone Sayadaw didn't want to go to the capital city when invited by king Mindon (at the time of king Mindon), the suitable Ashin Nanda was invited thus coming to Amarapura in 1217 ME (1855 CE) in the first month of Waso to spread the teachings of the Buddha.
- When Ashin Nanda came to the capital city, because there was no good place to stay, he (Ashin Nanda) stayed in the area of Shan Kalay Kyun where he (Ashin Nanda) stayed before and taught the Dhamma scriptures, becoming very famous. The Declaration of Dhamma and Vinaya (ဓမ္မဝိနယ အမိန့်တော်ပြန်တမ်း) published by the king Mindon was a great literary work compiled by Ashin Nanda.
- Ashin Nanda passed away during the era of king Mindon, in the Thadingyut month of year 1220 ME (1858 CE).
- Living in accordance with the Vinaya rules, Ashin Nanda didn't have the habit of talking with women. In the list of the teachers of Saya Kin, Ashin Nanda, her blood-relative younger brother, is not included.

The invitation of Saya Kin and Saya May Nat Bay to the Palace

- After building the Mandalay city in 1221 ME (1859 CE), king Mindon invited Shwegyin Sayadaw to the golden town.
- Because Shwegyin Sayadaw had respect for Ashin Nanda, he (Shwegyin Sayadaw) taught Dhamma scriptures together with Ashin Nanda.
- At that time the queen (of king Mindon) with her royal daughters invited Saya Kin and May Nat Bay who lived in Sagaing to teach knowledge and give advice (/"admonish") (them, i.e. the queen and her daughters).

¹¹ Me and Ma Hsu Yee Mon believe that this means the Thathanabaing was jealous of Ashin Nanda. Note that Ashin Nanda was later a good friend of Thee Lone Sayadaw and Shwegyin Sayadaw, and also much honored by king Mindon. (Just see the following notes.)

- When was Saya Kin invited by the king Mindon for the first time, she requested three promises to be followed:
 - 1. She (Saya Kin) should not be offered a building with tiered roof, as she was a lady who became a nun, and she wanted (/"for") to be respectful toward monks.
 - 2. She should not be given any kind of title/award.
 - 3. She should not be offered a rice-pot (කුර්ඃනිඃ).

Saya Kin accepted the invitation (/"followed") to the capital city only after the king Mindaya (မင်းတရားကြီး) accepted the three promises.

- Saya May Nat Bay, however, thinking "I am not as skilled in talking is Saya Kin, therefore it is not appropriate for me to (go to) the palace," stayed only in the forest. However, considering the Buddhist practice (/"Buddha's teachings") of the queen and her retinue, she (Saya May Nat Bay) accepted to follow (into the palace) after being requested for three times.
- Because Saya May Nat Bay was not talkative, speaking only for short time, she was known as a particularly angry person (වේධාල් ීා).
- Then, because the king Mindon respectully and reverently (invited Saya May Nat Bay), Saya May Nat Bay upon entering the palace usually jokingly remarked: "hey hey, may his [i.e. the king's] anger not fall upon me, hey".
- Saya May Na Bay stayed only if the great king was thus pleased, and then she returned to Mingun.
- Only Saya Kin lingered (longer) in the "golden" capital town, in the North-East portion of the Mandalay Hill.
- Staying mostly in the forest monastery of the Mandalay Palace's northern garden, (Saya Kin) engaged in spreading the Buddha's teachings (/teaching Dhamma) for the queen and her (i.e. the queen's) retinue.
- The king Mindon and Saya Kin (as well as the famous Ba Maw Sayadaw) were of the same age. Therefore, the king Mindon had greater respect for Saya Kin and supported her in various ways.
- King Mindon also built a monastery fo Sayakin, as promissed without tiered roof, with လည်ဖော်ယွန်းဆက်မောင်းမလယ် seat (/"throne") and lacquered stair-cases on all four cardinal-directions (/"sides"). King Mindon (as promissed) didn't bestow (upon Saya Kin) any award/title, (although) he (the king) offered (to Saya Kin) donations such as rice, dried fish, pepper, and onion. (And every month sending offering of a measure (/"one viss" (1.6 kg) of oil and a measure (/"two liters") of rice to every nun [of the Saya Kin's monastery]).
- The way how Saya Kin gained respect and reverence from the royal court is amazing becoming smart (/decent) according to the admonishment of Saya Kin even more than children follow the admonishment of their parents.
- There was no (reverential) address how Saya Kin would not be honored, and there was even written a poem by a member of the royal court.
- [The poem, in simple words, praises the qualities of Saya Kin free from craving, adoring the Dhamma, staying in a cave and avoiding people, vigilant, advanced and powerful in meditation, keeping her string of beads, accomplished in *jhānas*, of great morality/ethics, wonderful, keeping greed, hatred, and ignorance at bay.] Since this poem Saya Kin was in (historical) documents spoken of as *bhikkhunī*. At that time, however, it was quite common to take precept nuns (sayalays) on par with *bhikkhunīs* [i.e. taking precept nuns for *bhikkhunīs* and treating them as such; this doesn't say anything about presence

of *bhikkhunīs*]. Achote Tan Saya Phe (အချုပ်တန်းဆရာဖေ) mentioned in his poem: "နိဗ္ဗူကို စိတ်တူကြရအောင် ဘီကျွမလုပ်ပါတော့ကွယ်"¹² - "oh friend, so as to arouse their mind toward *Nibbāna*, call (/"make") (the precept nuns) as *bhikkhunīs*." – i.e. because the precept nuns also try to attain *Nibbāna*, they are called *bhikkhunīs*. (Certainly it doesn't mean that they would be called *bhikkhunī* in order to arouse their mind toward *Nibbāna*, because it would not fit in the context of the other text in this chapter. It doesn't seem to me wrong syntactically, though. And of course, there is a big difference between "making *bhikkhuṇīs*" and "calling as *bhikkhuṇīs*", but both the context as well as the syntax of this sentence make the second meaning very obvious.)

- Not only the people from the region, but also the queen with her royal ladies became nuns (taking as their teacher) Saya Kin and studied Dhamma (*pariyatti*) as well as practiced meditation. The great king Mindon made his sons to ordain as novices as well as his daughters to ordain as nuns.
- King Mindon made the royal daughters in their age of seven shaved and trained as nuns, served (however) by their royal companions.
- After king Mindon passed away, Salin Suphayar (ဇလင်းစုဇုရား) became a nun and stayed (as such) during the period before she ascended the throne. As a nun she went to stay at a quartz column near the Mandalay Hill, where she passed away. [The story doesn't clearly say how the nun passed away, although it mentions she died right inside the quartz column.] There is a poem of eulogy for the nun Salin Suphayar., written by U Kyaw Hla.
- King Mindon bestowed the title of *Susīri Myat-Swar Ratanādevī* ("Trully Flourishing, Nobly Gem of Female-Deity") to the princess that was given control over the Salin Town (စလင်းမြို့) and made her his queen. The chief-queens-to-be (ပင်တိုင်စံသမီးတော်) are (ladies that) aim at becoming the queens of the future king.
- Yun-paun-parabaik (ယွန်းပေါင်ပုရပိုက်, "lacquer-framed manuscript") had the upper lid made of oleo-resin (obtained from lacquer tree) and a mixture of four substances¹³ used in making lacquerware, painted by red, or it was gelded, or with a glass-mosaic. It was made for the royal orders of coronation of a crown prince, elevating a royal daughter to chief-queen-to-be, as a certificate of marriage, and it contained the verse of four stanzas "golden lacquer-frame that excels (with) a little inscription". However, the company of queens didn't appreciate such kind of elevation.
- The Shay Miphaya (ရှည်မိဇုရား), who was the mother-to-be of king Thibaw (သီပေါမင်း), aroused the idea to become a nun when she met with Saya Kin, but when she asked for permission even in writing, the king Mindon didn't permit.
- When Saya Kin became older (/"old"), she completely abandoned her engagement in teaching Dhamma and only practiced meditation, *vipassanā*.
- Once the king Mindon spoke thus to Saya Kin: "Saya Kin, ... some of the queens, royal daughters, and aga ob in the palace have no knowledge regarding religions or the supramundane. (They) are (like) dried gourd (hollow) bottles that will not sink (even) when thrown in the water. Only when Saya Kin teaches them, (they may) become like a pot filled with water." To this Saya Kin answered: "If there is a dried (hollow) gourd, (I) will have it filled with water. However, (I just) worry, that it will be water (yet

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¹² p.179

¹³ Namely wood-oil, sawdust, powdered charcoal and fine ash

from another) gourd. (I) don't wish that the water is just from (another) gourd." That means, that members of royal court should not teach nuns the issues of lay people.¹⁴

The Passing Away of Saya Kin

- When Saya Kin became old, she moved to Sagaing Hills and spent his time by practising *vipassanā* meditation. Throughout her life (/"from young age until the big age"), she would never miss the yearly religious duties and offering of rice at the great Kyauk Taw Buddha. On one day of offering rice, she would pay respects to the Buddha at eight in the evening, ¹⁵ and would stand up (again) only when a group of people came to offer rice in the morning.
- Saya Kin, the mother of nuns (သီလရှင်တို့၏ မိခင်ကြီး) passed away in her age of 68, on Wednesday, 5th day of the waxing moon of Pyatho, in 1244 ME (1883 CE) while she was practicing *vipassanā* meditation in the Sagaing Gu Ta Lone Hermitage (စစ်ကိုင်း ဂူတစ်လုံးရောင်) . It was after king Mindon passed away, four years after king Thibaw ascended the throne.
- When the king Thibaw learned about it, he was very disheartened and sad. As he (king Thibaw) could not arrive to the place, he asked the chief of Taik Taw region(တိုက်တော်သူကြီး) U Bo (ဦးဘို), who was meditating in the Anuruddha Hermitage (නෘနုရုဒ္ဓါရောင်), ¹⁶ to carry out the cremation of Saya Kin. There was built a splendid bricked structure with tiered roof in which the funeral remains of Saya Kin were deposited.

¹⁴ This of course, given the context above, is not a plausible explanation. Sayalay Kin obviously meant that she doesn't want to teach people who have not yet penetrated the Four Noble Truths (unenlightened) when she herself has not yet penetrated them.

¹⁵ This wording is bizarre (because in SE Asia rice offering for Buddha statues and pagodas is most often done only before noon, never after noon), but I think the offering of rice happened in the morning, and then after various rituals or meetings with people Saya Kin would finally sit down in the calm peaceful night.

¹⁶ Ma Hsu Yee Mon explains that some members of the royal court, brothers and other members of king's family might have had a region or so under control, but instead of engaging in official matters they spend their time by religious activities.